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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASMARA 000368

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

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SUBJECT: ARS HARDLINERS SELECT SHEIKH AWEYS

REF: ASMARA 309

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4 (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Members of the Alliance for the Re-Liberation for Somalia (ARS) who oppose the June 9 Djibouti reconciliation accords met in Asmara July 3 - 22. Claiming to represent the ARS Central Committee, the militant ARS faction selected Sheikh Aweys as its leader, purported to have expelled dozens of moderate ARS members (including Sheikh Sharif, the legitimate ARS chairman), and denounced the Djibouti agreement. The opening session of the ARS hardliners' gathering was held in the Eritrean Ministry of Education building, indicating the Isaias regime's strong support for the Aweys faction. End Summary.

"WE'RE A MAJORITY," HARDLINERS ALLEGE

12. (C) ARS hardliners who reject the reconciliation accords signed by the ARS and Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Djibouti June 9 rallied in Asmara July 3 - 22. Billing their meeting as the "Second Regular Session of the Central Committee," the hardliners allege to have gathered a quorum and the backing of a majority of the Central Committee members, thereby legitimizing the outcome of the proceedings. Post has no way to determine the veracity of these claims, which may be greatly exaggerated to enhance the rejectionists' credibility. While some media outlets report that 140 of 193 members of the Central Committee were present, Ismail Adow, ARS public affairs assistant, is quoted in the Islam Online blogsite as claiming, "Fifty members were present today, while another 30 voted through e-mails." A reliable embassy contact who personally attended the June 22 closing session reported that the hall was packed, but he was unable to say how many of the attendees were Central Committee members.

13. (SBU) THE FINAL COMMUNIQUE

The Aweys faction issued a public statement July 22 ("The Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia Communiqué") at the conclusion of its three-week confab. Excerpts follow.

-- it was noted with utmost satisfaction the continued success of the war of re-liberation...against the forces of the occupying Ethiopian enemy and its quislings.

-- Sharif Sheikh Ahmed and Hassan Sheikh Aden betrayed their trust...conspired with the enemies of the Somali people against the national cause of re-liberating the motherland.

-- the culmination of the conspiracy was the farcical agreement entered into with the so-called TFG and signed in Djibouti on June 9th.

-- (the conspiracy began) under coercion by Western powers who not only support, but also diplomatically, economically, militarily, and politically sustain the Ethiopian enemy occupation of Somalia.

-- appeal to the International Community to note the just cause of the Somali people's struggle to re-liberte their own country from the Ethiopian enemy occupation.

-- expresses gratitude for the State of Eritrea, government and people, and also other friendly sources for their unwavering support for the just cause of the Somali people.

14. (SBU) HARDLINERS SUPPOSEDLY EXPEL MODERATES

The Final Communique went on to list 37 individuals who were condemned for supporting the Djibouti accords and who where thereby purportedly expelled from the ARS. The list begins with "1) Sheekh Shariif Sheekh Axmed, 2) Shariif Xasan Sheekh Aaden..." and continues through "37) Cabdiraxmaan Yussuf Faarax." Some media accounts characterize the 37 as members of the Central Committee, but Post cannot corroborate that

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claim. Some hardliners supposedly accused the USG of corrupting Sheikh Sharif with a grant of \$5m paid directly to his accounts.

15. (C) AND SELECT SHEIKH AWEYS

Media and local sources state that after a five-hour debate the hardliners elected as "ARS Chairman" Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, with Dr. Zakariyah M. H. Abdi as Vice Chairman. Hussein M. Aidid and General Jama M. Ghalib were supposedly elected to the 11-member Executive Committee. Observers say the participants attempted to strike a balance among clan, diaspora groups, the former Islamic Courts, and former parliamentarians.

(NOTE: See bio notes on Aweys, Abdi, and Aidid reftel. We believe Abdi is a UK citizen who did extensive fundraising in Minneapolis in 2007. END NOTE.)

16. (C) COMMENT: Post is unable to say with any certainty how many ARS Central Committee members supported the hardliners' gathering in Asmara. Both the Aweys faction and moderate supporters of Sheikh Sharif will undoubtedly attempt to convince the world that they are the "legitimate ARS." Whatever the outcome, the split in the ARS, now public, will make the Djibouti accords more difficult to implement. The fingerprints of the Isaias regime are all over the hardliners' communique. Strongly militant, nationalistic, and anti-Ethiopian, it contains no Islamist rhetoric or references whatsoever, as one would expect it to given the preponderance of Islamic Courts influence in the Aweys faction. Rather, it calls for Somalis to re-liberate their motherland, drive out the Ethiopian occupiers, and condemn the TFG quislings and ARS betrayers who were coerced by Western powers. All standard fare in the Eritrean Ministry of Information propaganda mill. End Comment.

MCMULLEN